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SUBJECT: UNHCR ENCOURAGES REFUGEE SELF-RELIANCE AND GOM
COOPERATION

REF: A. NOUAKCHOTT 0036

- [1](#)B. CASABLANCA 00634
- [1](#)C. CASABLANCA 00818
- [1](#)D. RABAT 01219
- [1](#)E. RABAT 01394
- [1](#)F. RABAT 01507

Classified By: A/Polcouns Cherie Lenzen, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On August 10, A/Polcouns met with Johannes van der Klaauw, head of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) office in Rabat to discuss the July 24 to 27 sit-ins in front of his office and recent developments relating to the Western Sahara. Van der Klaauw emphasized that the working relationship between UNHCR and the GOM has not yet been developed to the point he had hoped it would be.

The GOM is not assisting refugees, but yet would like UNHCR's status to be permanent. Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) for Sahrawi families are stagnated. Van der Klaauw stated that he thought this situation was caused by a combination of MINURSO wanting to expand its work to humanitarian issues and by intervention from the Polisario. End Summary.

The Sit-In

[1](#)2. (C) Between July 24 to 27, approximately seventy refugees, primarily from the Ivory Coast and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, staged a sit-in at the UNHCR headquarters. Late on the night of July 27, Van der Klaauw requested the intervention of a nearby Catholic priest and the sit-in ended. Van der Klaauw then met with the refugees at the church. By the time of the meeting, the number of refugees had swollen to over 200. They threatened to continue the sit-in; Van der Klaauw responded that the office would be closed, resolutions to their cases would not be determined and services would be suspended. The refugees agreed to continue working with Van der Klaauw to find solutions to their problems and the sit-in ceased. On July 31, Van der Klaauw invited leaders into his office to discuss possibilities. The meeting ended with UNHCR offering a special package of USD 500 for recognized refugees "all across the board," and not just sit-in participants.

[1](#)3. (C) While the sit-in problem was contained, the refugee

issues remain mostly unresolved. The lack of resolution stems from three factors, according to Van der Klaauw: a lack of funds from Geneva/UNHCR (Note: The UNHCR budget has been cut. Van der Klaauw did point out that US financial support to UNHCR is vital. End Note.), the 1400 case backlog from prior to October 2005 when Van der Klaauw became the director, and the lack of staff for the Rabat office.

Who are the Refugees

¶4. (C) UNHCR rejects approximately 20 percent of refugee applicants following initial interviews for not having a legitimate asylum claim. The result is that there are fewer economic migrant applications for refugee status, and a decrease in applicants from Nigeria, Mali, and Senegal, noted Van der Klaauw (reftel A). There were 2500 cases to be processed by UNHCR -- 1100 have been decided on, 500 have been interviewed but not decided on, and 900 are left to be interviewed. (Note: The number of cases seem to be in flux. End Note.) He stated that 220 out of the 1100 finished cases were recognized, or 18 percent. Van der Klaauw said that in addition to these old cases, UNHCR receives approximately 500 applications a month, for which the acceptance rate is higher because they are initially rejecting more. (Note: The result will be a higher percentage of asylum cases. End Note.)

¶5. (C) Van der Klaauw stated that the majority of refugee applicants are from the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Ivory Coast. Refugees from the Ivory Coast tend to be young, single men who are escaping the warring factions. He explained that many Ivorians are recognized under an "extended mandate" and can be protected under the UNHCR

extended interpretation of the mandate to include the category of "generalized violence." Since the GOM has a policy of "no return" for Ivorians, they are given refugee status. (Note: Citizens from Senegal and Mali do not require visas to enter Morocco. Van der Klaauw identified a "class system" in the migrant community -- French speakers are more acceptable than others. End Note.) Thirty percent of those from the Democratic Republic of Congo are women with children. Many of the Congolese women, according to Van der Klaauw, are victims of sexual violence either from incidents in the Congo, or, from the trip (approximately seven months) to reach Morocco; and, unfortunately, there is a lack of medical care. He gave the example of a 14 year-old Congolese girl who was raped en route from Kinshasa. Van der Klaauw is attempting to obtain third country asylum for her. He noted that although these cases of sexual violence are not necessarily refugees, they are still victims who require psychological treatment.

¶6. (C) Van der Klaauw explained that the refugee population remains modest -- 200 refugees had been recognized by the UNHCR in the past 40 years, i.e., prior to Van der Klaauw's arrival in 2005. Of these 200, he said that 15-20 cases still need to be resolved. Van der Klaauw described the growing expectations of refugees as a "dependency syndrome." Many refugees expect UNHCR to pay them a monthly stipend and pay for private school. He emphasized the limited resources of the UNHCR's budget and that priority is given to the physically impaired, aged, women and children. The UNHCR has succeeded in getting refugee children formally recognized by the public school system, although it cannot afford to finance children in private schools. He explained how the UNHCR recently had to finance a Christian funeral for a refugee, which cost 7000 dirhams (approximately USD 750). (Note: A Muslim burial costs between 400-500 dirhams. End Note.) Van der Klaauw emphasized the importance of rectifying the misconceptions of the UN's role and helping refugees shift to a model of self-reliance.

¶7. (C) More refugees are seeking resettlement in third countries, according to Van der Klaauw. He explained that resettlement is possible for only a minority of cases, e.g.,

women and children at risk and those with medical conditions.

Van der Klaauw said that the UNHCR wishes to avoid making Morocco a "pathway to other countries," because it cannot afford to play such a role.

Getting the GOM Involved

18. (C) Van der Klaauw noted the difficulty in furthering cooperation with the GOM if UNHCR cannot provide figures on the future refugee population and prove to them that it is manageable. If UNHCR uses the average of cases recently recognized, 18 percent, it estimates approximately 500 new refugees yearly, according to Van der Klaauw. He affirmed that it is not the UNHCR's goal to remain permanently in Morocco -- they hope to "phase out" and allow the GOM to "take over." Van der Klaauw said he hopes for the creation of an "Asylum Body," or a parastatal composed of specially trained officers from the Ministry of the Interior (MOI), asylum experts, and law enforcement officers. Van der Klaauw, however, recognized challenges in engaging the GOM. He said that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) asked him to talk to the MOI, which indicated to him that "things are moving." He reported that N. Zerouali (MOI) told him to "be patient," and that a strategy was being worked on. Van der Klaauw was optimistic and said he knew the GOM recognized the seriousness of the UNHCR. He also said the GOM is in the process of discussing setting up a central asylum policy. Van der Klaauw's goal is to involve the GOM in the legislative process. He wants to encourage the release of joint decisions and the specialized training of GOM officials. He also discussed cooperation with other UN agencies and GOM agencies on issues such as economics, trafficking, and asylum-seekers which are related to refugee issues. Van der Klaauw provided a copy of a report, entitled "Addressing Mixed Migratory Movements: A 10-Point Plan of Action," which he officially gave to the MFA in July; however, this document is still being negotiated (reftel B).

19. (C) Prior to the July Rabat conference on migration (reftel C), the UNHCR prepared an interim agreement and expected this to be signed during the High Commissioner's visit on July 10. The agreement defined the UNHCR's "interim" status, meant to lead to permanent status but the GOM returned it with text added indicating a permanent status. The agreement was not signed by UNHCR; Van der Klaauw indicated that the agreement might be signed in October.

Other Actors

10. (C) Van der Klaauw noted the importance of a collaborative approach on refugee issues. He mentioned the possibility of Oxfam, but said their scope is limited to creating safe havens for married women raped by Moroccans. Van der Klaauw said UNIFEM expressed interest but worries that they are not very operational. He also underlined the importance of small projects, such as skills training, that will boost self-reliance. He said he wants to see new approaches and activities, such as community service, to create new employment and also mentioned encouraging industries to give jobs to refugees. He recognized the difficulties in finding employment opportunities since the UNHCR registration is not officially recognized by the GOM. (Note: The GOM has said that the UNHCR is not yet an authority on refugee recognition because of its 2005 "backlog," during which it allegedly handed out papers "left and right," according to Van der Klaauw. End Note.)

The Western Sahara

11. (C) Van der Klaauw said that he now has some responsibility for managing the confidence building measures

(CBMs) process, but that it is not operational. The Laayoune office is supervised by Alexandra Morelli. He noted that there is a regional plan to which they would like to adhere. On the one hand, Van der Klaauw recognized that UNHCR had changed the CBMs; and, on the other hand, he noted that the Polisario are responsible for the current stagnation (reftels D, E, F).

¶12. (C) According to Van der Klaauw, Rabat is often perceived as the sole actor in the Western Sahara and that there are separate constituencies. He also noted that the GOM is angry because of MINURSO's ideas and suggestions to be involved beyond its peace-keeping role. He recognized the GOM's complaints that the CBMs were politicized but affirmed that the UNHCR administered them correctly and had nothing to do with whether some misused it. He also acknowledged the sensitivity of the Western Sahara and how quickly people judge all statements as political, i.e., either supporting Morocco or supporting the Polisario.

Visit Embassy Rabat's Classified Website;
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>

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